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Benjamin Franklin Vindicated



**An Exposure of the FRANKLIN "PROPHECY"
by American Scholars**



American Jewish Congress
221 West 57th Street
New York City

THE "Franklin Prophecy," repeatedly exposed as a forgery, has again been revived and is being used in speeches and in the press as one of the most effective weapons of anti-Jewish propaganda. In Germany and Italy it continually appears in the press and is broadcast over the radio. It has been incorporated in the Nazi Bible, the *Handbuch der Judenfrage* by Theodor Fritsch (38th edition, 1935). Quotations from it are featured on the dedication page of a novel published by the official publication house of the National Socialist Party. During the recent plebiscite campaign, Reichsminister Rudolph Hess cited it in his speech of November 30th at Komotau, Sudetenland.

In America, its circulation is on the increase. Getting its start from official Nazi propaganda, it turns up in the form of chain letters. Printed copies, sometimes containing grammatical and typographical errors, are found in railway stations, trains, buses, and other public places. It was circulated in New York State during the recent election campaign.

The facsimile reproduction on the following page is the most common of the versions now being distributed. The reader will note the inclusion of the statement that the "original of this copy is in the Franklin Institute." The Director of the Institute and the Librarian have officially and repeatedly denied the existence of the document. Their denials have been ignored by the propagandists to whom facts are of no importance.

We present the following material in the hope that the American public, strong in its sense of fairness, will judge for itself the justice of the denials and the falseness of the accusations. The reader can become a partner in the good work of combatting malicious propaganda by encouraging the circulation of this pamphlet. Additional copies of it can be procured from the publishers.

Excerpt from the Journal of Charles Pinckney of South Carolina, of the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of 1789. Regarding the statement of Benjamin Franklin at the convention concerning Jewish immigration.

"There is a great danger for the United States of America. This great danger is the Jew. Gentlemen, in every land the Jews have settled, they have depressed the moral level and lowered the degree of commercial honesty. They have remained a-part and un-assimilated; oppressed, they attempt to strangle the nation financially, as in the case of Portugal and Spain.

For more than seventeen hundred years they have lamented their sorrowful fate—namely, that they have been driven out of their mother land; but, gentlemen, if the civilized world today should give them back Palestine and their property, they would immediately find pressing reason for not returning there. Why? . . . Because they are vampires and vampires cannot live on other vampires—they cannot live among themselves. They must live among Christians and others who do not belong to their race.

If they are not expelled from the United States by the Constitution within less than one hundred years, they will stream into this country in such numbers that they will rule and destroy us and change our form of Government for which we Americans shed our blood and sacrificed our life, property and personal freedom. If the Jews are not excluded within two hundred years, our children will be working in the fields to feed Jews while they remain in counting houses, gleefully rubbing their hands.

I warn you, gentlemen, if you do not exclude the Jews forever, your children and your children's children will curse you in their graves. Their ideas are not those of Americans, even when they lived among us for ten generations. The leopard cannot change his spots. The Jews are a danger to this land and if they are allowed to enter, they will imperil our institutions. They should be excluded by the Constitution."

The original of this copy is in the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, Pa.

FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION OF FORGERY

"A lie is believed because of the unconditional and insolent inflexibility with which it is propagated and because it takes advantage of the sentimental and extreme sympathies of the masses . . . Therefore, something always is retained even from the most impudent of lies."—ADOLPH HITLER IN "MEIN KAMPF."

EXPOSING THE ANTI-SEMITIC FORGERY ABOUT FRANKLIN

By CHARLES A. BEARD

CHARLES A. BEARD, the eminent historian, is best known for his joint work with Mrs. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, 1927).

ON February 3, 1934, William Dudley Pelley published in his journal "Liberation" a passage purporting to be an extract from the "Private Diary" of Charles Pinckney, of South Carolina, in which Benjamin Franklin was quoted as denouncing Jews in unmeasured terms, with all the savagery of a Hitler or Goebbels. Mr. Pelley declared that Pinckney, as one of the framers of the Constitution, had taken notes on "Chit-chat around the Table during Intermissions," that he had published this diary, that General W. T. Sherman had ordered the destruction of private libraries during the Civil War, and that among the rare books sacrificed was Pinckney's diary. But, Mr. Pelley went on to say, a copy survived in the hands of a descendant in the southwestern part of Georgia, and that the extract in "Liberation" was taken from this copy. Where the copy is now, who has it, Mr. Pelley did not state; nor has any copy yet been discovered by extensive researches.

In August, 1934, the "Weltdienst," an international news service, anti-Jewish in bias, published in Erfurt, Germany, in three languages—German, French and English—issued this alleged statement by Franklin condemning the Jews. In so doing it did not mention the name of Pinckney, but ascribed the document to the journal of a delegate to the constitutional convention of "1789."

Later in August, the "Volksbund," a Swiss Nazi organ reprinted the alleged Franklin "Prophecy" ascribing its source to "co-workers in Germany."

In its issue of the first week of September, "Der Stuermer," the fiery organ published by Julius Streicher, contained a dispatch from its New York Correspondent, J. L. MacCormick, quoting the alleged Franklin "Prophecy" and using it as an

introduction to an attack on the Jews in the customary Nazi style.

On September 20, the "Jewish Daily Bulletin," in commenting upon the article in "Der Stuermer," referred to the alleged prophecy of Franklin, without quoting it in detail or inquiring into its authenticity.

Five days later, September 25, 1934, Robert Edward Edmondson, who has been accused by Mr. John Spivak of being a Nazi agent in the United States, sent the alleged Franklin "Prophecy" to investment and brokerage houses, business men, and others interested in his program or subscribing to his "service." In the hands of Mr. Edmondson the document and its history take the form of a different version. Although it is not exactly identical with the extract published by Mr. Pelley, it is the same in substance.

When this release by Mr. Edmondson came into my hands, I was amazed by the document. As a student of the writings of Pinckney and Franklin, I had never seen anything like it, and on October 15, 1934, I wrote to Mr. Edmondson asking him to give me the source from which his Franklin "Prophecy" was taken, as I desired to examine the original myself. To my letter Mr. Edmondson replied that he understood that the "copy" for the "Prophecy" "emanated from Mr. Madison Grant of New York City, unauthenticated." He added that several investigations were being conducted to determine its authenticity, and that he had felt justified in issuing it because mention of it in the Jewish "Daily Bulletin" had caused a widespread demand for the story. In short, Mr. Edmondson published the alleged statement and then conducted inquiries to determine its authenticity.

Since Mr. Edmondson referred to Mr. Grant as the source of the story, I wrote to Mr. Grant on October 20, asking him to be good enough to tell me where I could find the original document. In reply, Mr. Grant stated that some years ago he had received what "purported" to be a copy of Franklin's remarks before the convention in Philadelphia, but had "no information whatever as to the authenticity of the paper."

Although I was pretty well convinced by this time that the Franklin "Prophecy" was a pure fabrication, I had been taught by bitter experience the dangers of drawing a negative conclusion. It is not easy in historical writing to prove a negative in the absence of authentic evidence. So I wrote to an old friend of mine, one of the outstanding scholars in the United States, a man most familiar with the writings of both Franklin and Pinckney. Should I mention his name, his authority would be immediately recognized, but I must not bring him into this affair.* To my inquiry this scholar replied that there are indications which make it almost certain that Pinckney did not keep a diary of convention proceedings. He added that there is nowhere any evidence that Franklin ever made such a speech and that it is inconceivable that he should ever have done so. In addition, my friend declared flatly: "The alleged Franklin document is merely a forgery, and a crude one at that."

Although convinced by this scholar's report that the Franklin "Prophecy" was a crude forgery, I still had the historian's suspicion that there might be somewhere in Franklin's writings one or more remarks derogatory to the Jews, which could furnish some slender basis for the fabrication. So, I searched Franklin's writings myself, and had searches made by scholarly assistants in the available records, including the vast collections of Frankliniana in Philadelphia. I have sought the alleged Diary of Pinckney.

All these searches have produced negative results. I cannot find a single original source that gives the slightest justification for believing that the "Prophecy" is anything more than a barefaced forgery. Not a word have I discovered in Franklin's letters and papers expressing any such sentiments against the Jews as are ascribed to him by the Nazis—American and German.† His well-known liberality in matters of religious opinions would, in fact, have precluded the kind of

*Professor Beard informed the editors of the CONTEMPORARY JEWISH RECORD that this reference is to the late J. F. Jameson, librarian of Congress and outstanding historian.

†In all his writings, Franklin has made just one reference to the Jews which might be considered derogatory. This paragraph, so humanly expressive of a borrower's resentment, has been used by propagandists in an attempt to prove that Franklin might also have written the "Prophecy." The excerpt is from a letter to John Adams in which Franklin comments on the extravagant terms named in a loan negotiation. It reads as follows: "By this time, I fancy your Excellency is

utterances put in his mouth by this palpable forgery. Had he or any members of the Constitutional convention entertained such violent convictions it is scarcely possible that they would have allowed the opportunity to pass for putting a bar in the Constitution when provisions for the regulation of foreign commerce and for naturalization were up for consideration. The proceedings of the convention were secret and any member was free to speak his mind without fear of publicity. Franklin was then an old man beyond all earthly ambitions and spoke freely without thought of effects on his political career. In his writings on immigration, Franklin made no mention of discrimination against Jews.

So much for the negative evidence to the effect that Franklin did not utter the sentiments expressed in the alleged "Prophecy" or say anything which could be twisted to imply that he entertained any such views. On the other side there is positive evidence that he held Jews in high regard. When the Hebrew Society of Philadelphia sought to raise money for "a religious house," or synagogue, in Philadelphia, Franklin signed the petition of appeal for contributions to "citizens of every religious denomination," and gave £5 himself to the fund. If he held the views falsely ascribed to him, he would scarcely have given money and lent his influence in the promotion of the Society's project.

Strange as it may seem to the creators and circulators of this alleged "Prophecy," the only racial immigration which Franklin feared was the influx of Germans, and he did not propose to set up a bar against them. In view of the fact that German Nazis make so much of the Franklin forgery, it seems fitting to include here just what Franklin did say about the Germans in a letter written in 1753:

"I am perfectly of your mind that measures of great temper are necessary with the Germans; and am not without apprehension,

satisfied that I was wrong in supposing J. de Neufville as much a Jew as any in Jerusalem, since Jacob was not content with any percents but took the whole of his brother Esau's birthright—and his posterity did the same by the Canaanites and cut their throats into the bargain; which I do not think Neufville has the least inclination to do by us while he can get anything by our being alive." We present it here in order to leave it to the reader to judge whether, weighed against Franklin's well-known liberalism and his contribution to a building fund for a Philadelphia Synagogue, it may be considered as having any bearing on his views in regard to American policy. Evidently Professor Beard has not considered this sufficiently important to mention in the article. [EDITORS.]

that, through their indiscretion, or ours, or both, great disorders may one day arise among us. Those who come hither are generally the most stupid of their own nation, and, as ignorance is often attended with credulity when knavery would mislead it, and with suspicion when honesty would set it right; and as few of the English understand the German language, and so cannot address them either from the press or the pulpit, it is almost impossible to remove any prejudice they may entertain. Their clergy have very little influence on the people, who seem to take a pleasure in abusing and discharging the minister on every trivial occasion. Not being used to liberty they know not how to make a modest use of it. And as Holben says of the young Hottentots, that they are not esteemed men until they have shown their manhood by beating their mothers, so these seem not to think themselves free, till they can feel their liberty in abusing and insulting their teachers. Thus they are under no restraint from ecclesiastical government; they behave, however, submissively enough at present to the civil government, which I wish they may continue to do, for I remember when they modestly declined intermeddling in our elections, but now they come in droves and carry all before them, except in one or two countries.

"Few of their children in the country know English. They import many books from Germany; and of the six printing houses in the province, two are entirely German, two half-German, half-English, and but two entirely English. They have one German newspaper, and one half-German. Advertisements, intended to be general, are now printed in Dutch and English. The signs in our streets, have inscriptions in both languages, and in some places only German. They begin of late to make all their bonds and other legal instruments in their own language, which (though I think it ought not to be) are allowed good in our courts, where the German business so increases that there is continued need of interpreters; and I suppose in a few years they will also be necessary in the Assembly, to tell half of our legislators what the other half say.

"In short, unless the stream of their importation could be turned from this to other colonies, as you very judiciously propose, they will soon so outnumber us that all the advantages we have will, in my opinion, be not able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious."

One more point should be made in respect of this "Prophecy" ascribed to Franklin: The phraseology of the alleged "Prophecy" is not that of the eighteenth century; nor is the language that of Franklin. It contains certain words that belong to contemporary Germany rather than America of Franklin's period. For example, the word "homeland" was not employed by Jews in Franklin's time. It was created in connection with the Palestine mandate. Furthermore the

return to Palestine, or Zionism, was not a popular movement at that time. Few, if anyone, dreamed that Palestine could then be wrested from Turkish rule and made a homeland for Jews.

What is, then, the upshot? This alleged "Prophecy" ascribed to Franklin is a crude forgery, and his name should be cleared of the crass prejudices attributed to him. There is in our historical records no evidence whatever of any basis for the falsehood. Whoever encounters this piece of propaganda should nail it at once. If the gentlemen who have given it currency have any honor, they will either produce their proof or publicly confess their offence.

Those willing to attack character in the name of falsehood may go their way, but unless the spirit of scholarship and fair play is dead in America they will be challenged at every point in their sinuous career.

From *Jewish Frontier*, New York, March 1935, pages 10-13.

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FRANKLIN AND THE JEWS

By HENRY BUTLER ALLEN

HENRY BUTLER ALLEN, D.Sc., is Director of the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia

REPORTS have been widely circulated, for several years, off and on, saying that Dr. Franklin made a speech during the Constitutional Convention against the Jewish race. The purported speech is printed, and said to be quoted in full, from a "private diary" kept by Charles Pinckney of South Carolina, who was a fellow delegate with Franklin at the Convention in 1787.

But this "private diary" has not been produced. Historians and librarians have not been able to find it or any record of it having existed. The historians have said further that some of the words and phraseology used in the quoted speech cast grave doubt on its colonial origin. In plain English, they have claimed it a fake.

The Charles Pinckney "private diary" containing Franklin's vitriolic speech is now reported to be in possession of The Franklin Institute.

The truth is, we *do not* possess the notorious diary. In fact we know no more about its whereabouts than we did before, and that was nothing.

Franklin said, "There is much difference between imitating a good man, and counterfeiting him." We want to do a good turn wherever we can. We therefore suggest to those engaged in presumably counterfeiting a good man's language, for furthering their hellish desire to fan the flame of racial hatred, that they spend the same amount of time in doing something useful.

With this object in view we suggest that they first read about some of the things which Franklin is known to have done. One pertinent and authenticized statement is that when the Hebrew Society of Philadelphia sought to raise money for "a religious house," or synagogue, in Philadelphia, Franklin signed the petition of appeal for contributions to "citizens of every religious denomination," and gave five pounds himself to the fund.

We haven't the faith to believe that these present-day fanatics will immediately become civilized by reading Franklin's writings, but some good may result nevertheless. We suggest to our benighted friends that they read what Franklin thought about Honesty, Peace, Virtue, Religion, Industry and Citizenship.

The Franklin Institute *does not* have the mythical Pinckney diary. But it *does have* ready for you a new and novel nonprofit edition of Franklin's writings, in pamphlets, classified under the headings listed above. There are nine in all and are called the PROFILE OF GENIUS series. You can fetch or order them from The Franklin Institute or from your bookstore at a price which covers our cost. Below you will find further particulars.

"A lie stands on one leg, truth on two."—*Poor Richard*.

From *The Institute News*, published by the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia, Pa., Vol. III, No. 4, August 1938, pages 1-2.

STATEMENT BY ALFRED RIGLING

ALFRED RIGLING, M.A., is Librarian of the Franklin Institute.

THE document said to be an abstract from the Journal of Charles Pinckney of South Carolina does not exist. Neither the original, nor any copy of it, is in the possession of The Franklin Institute. Historians and Historical Societies have endeavored to locate the Pinckney work, but without success. There is no copy in the Library of Congress, or the New York Public Library. Our state Historical Society has made careful investigation and fails to find any information concerning it. On the evening of July 16, a broadcaster from Germany read this fictitious statement, and we have reason to believe now that this is foreign propaganda.

August 12, 1938.

STATEMENT BY J. HENRY SMYTHE, Jr.

J. HENRY SMYTHE, JR., is Compiler of *The Amazing Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia, 1929).

BANKNOTE forgeries mostly affect people's purses. Forgeries at the expense of a Patriot's reputation deserve much greater censure. Some Americans are handing around a forged Benjamin Franklin "prophecy" who would not pass a counterfeit bill or coin.

As founder of "Franklin Day", as a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania founded by Dr. Franklin, and as a member of the Benjamin Franklin Committee of the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution, I vehemently protest against the circulation of anti-Jewish statements wrongly attributed to Franklin. This libel of the Jewish race is unjust both to Jews and to the name and fame of Benjamin Franklin. Numerous Franklin authorities have exposed this hoax. I too have investigated this calumny and find no historical basis.

November 14, 1938.

EXPLANATION BY JULIAN P. BOYD

MR. JULIAN BOYD is the Librarian of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

WITHIN the past month Franklin's mythical speech full of animadversions against the Jews, which he is supposed to have delivered before the Constitutional Convention, has reappeared in the daily press. According to the published account, this speech warned the people of the United States against the "vampire" race, and concluded: "I warn you, gentlemen, if you do not exclude the Jews forever, your children and your children's children will curse you in their graves."

The prevalence of these statements has been traced to the February 3, 1934, issue of *Liberation*, the publication of a Fascist organization which appeared in Asheville, N. C. in 1933. "Franklin's Prophecy," so-called, was immediately reprinted by papers in Germany and Switzerland and from thence, recrossing the Atlantic, it turned up in the United States in September 25, 1934, in a pamphlet circulated from New York by Robert Edward Edmondson.

The "Prophecy," characterized by Professor Charles A. Beard, in the *Jewish Frontier* for March, 1935, as a "barefaced forgery," was supposed to be found in a diary kept by Charles Pinckney of South Carolina. No such diary is known to exist nor can anything resembling it be found among any of the extant Pinckney papers. Furthermore, neither Professor Beard's examination of Franklin's writings nor careful searches in the available records "including the vast collections of Frankliniana in Philadelphia" have produced anything that "gives the slightest justification for believing that the 'Prophecy' is . . . more than a barefaced forgery. Not a word," wrote Professor Beard, "have I discovered in Franklin's letters and papers expressing such sentiments against the Jews as are ascribed to him by the Nazis—American and German." There is, moreover, positive evidence that Franklin held Jews in high esteem, and when the Hebrew Society of Philadelphia was trying to raise money for a "religious house",

Franklin not only signed the petition appealing for contributions to "Citizens of every religious denomination", but he also contributed £5 to the fund. Finally, it should be remarked that the language of the "Prophecy" is neither of the eighteenth century nor in the usual vein of Franklin.

The history of this document, falsely ascribed to one whose liberal opinions are so well known as to be almost axiomatic, is typical of the course of similar pieces of propagandist literature. Originating in some obscure corner, the story travels and gains credence as it goes. Exposure follows in due time, but often not until a wrong impression, difficult to eradicate, has been created. In this case, it is to be hoped that Professor Beard's statement will be more than sufficient to prevent any further misunderstanding of Franklin's attitude towards the Jews.

From "Society News and Accessions," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 61, April, 1937, pages 233-234.



NAZI "FRANKLIN PROPHECY" BASELESS FICTION

IT is sufficient proof for the general public when the historian Charles A. Beard and Dr. John Musser, Dean of the Graduate School of New York University, disprove in the newspapers the authenticity of the anti-Semitic "prophecy" attributed to Benjamin Franklin in recent Nazi government press releases, but the members of this Society undoubtedly would welcome a statement by our own unimpeachable authority, Mr. John Clyde Oswald. When the propaganda first appeared in the fall of 1934, emanating from an anti-Semitic secret organization, Mr. Oswald answered an inquirer as follows:

"It is, of course, impossible to say definitely about any man that he did not do any particular thing. The negative is always difficult of proof. On the other hand, there is no evidence that Franklin did make the statement. It is couched somewhat in his customary phraseology, except that there is in it an absence of the tolerance which is a distinguishing

characteristic of practically everything he is known to have written. Franklin did make statements about Old Testament Hebrews but so far as I can determine, he wrote nothing along the lines of this particular document.

"The first statement reads:

"The following speech was made by the great Benjamin Franklin; is taken from the notes of the Member of Congress, William Pinckney (1789):"

"Two things are wrong with this statement. First, there is no record of Benjamin Franklin having made a speech on any occasion throughout his long career. It is true that he was on the stand at the celebrated inquiry of the Privy Council in London but what he said there was in answer to interrogation only. He made no formal address.

"The proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 were, as you undoubtedly know, secret. No official record was kept but a great deal of information has been accumulated and pieced together, giving a fairly good picture of what transpired.

"Franklin was then eighty-one years of age and in poor health. He took an active part in the proceedings but made his contributions to the deliberations not orally but in written memoranda, which he handed to his friend, James Wilson, another member of the Philadelphia delegation, who sat by him and who read them to the Convention. They have been preserved and the collection is believed to be complete.

"The second thing is, William Pinckney was not a member of the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention, being in fact only twenty-three years of age at the time it was held. He was not a member of the Congress in 1789, which is the date given in the document, but did become a member in 1816, twenty-six years after Franklin's death.

"I am not a Hebrew or a descendant of Hebrews and I am not defending the race but I do believe, however, that some of the statements made in the document are not in accordance with the facts and would not have been made by Franklin."

From *The Benjamin Franklin Gazette*, Official Publication of the International Benjamin Franklin Society, New York, May 1937, p. 9.

STATEMENT BY CARL VAN DOREN

CARL VAN DOREN, well-known writer and lecturer, is the author of *Benjamin Franklin*, New York, 1938

THE speech against the Jews which Benjamin Franklin is alleged to have made at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 is a forgery, produced within the past five years. The forger, whoever he was, claims that the speech was taken down by Charles Pinckney of South Carolina and preserved in his Journal. The forger presumably knew that, in a letter to John Quincy Adams dated December 30, 1818, Pinckney said he had kept a Journal of the proceedings at the Convention. But this Journal, if it ever existed, has never been found. The forger claims that Pinckney "published" the Journal "for private distribution among his friends" with the title *Chit-Chat Around the Table During Intermissions*. No copy of any such printed Journal has come to light. Not content with these two claims, the forger has further asserted that the original manuscript of Franklin's speech, apparently from Pinckney's Journal, is in the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia. The Franklin Institute does not possess the manuscript.

The forger's authority for his document is nearly as mythical as could be imagined. He cites a manuscript which does not exist, a printed book or pamphlet which nobody has seen, a Journal which has been lost for more than a hundred years. There is no evidence of the slightest value that Franklin ever made the alleged speech or ever said or thought anything of the kind about the Jews.

Most of this material is reprinted from the November, 1938, issue of the
CONTEMPORARY JEWISH RECORD.